

Harkin says rural development gets boost in stimulus bill

Monday, February 16, 2009, 2:46 PM

by Julie Harker

The economic stimulus package passed by Congress targets some specific rural development initiatives. Senate Ag Committee Chairman Tom Harkin says the largest portion for Rural America goes toward increasing high-speed internet in through \$2.5 Billion in broadband grants, loans and guarantees.

Senator Harkin says the stimulus bill also includes money to support rural water and waste disposal, infrastructure improvements of Agriculture Research Buildings such as the aging Animal Disease Lab in Ames, Iowa, and, rural housing. For towns with fewer than 20,000 residents, a portion goes to support loans and grants for day care and elder care facilities, hospitals, health clinics and public safety. And, he says there's extra funding for existing food and nutrition programs such as WIC, and, emergency and supplemental food assistance programs.

The stimulus bill also provides \$290 Million for the watershed flood and prevention operations to help clear debris which Harkin says will put "real money in the pockets of farmers who will spend it locally" and "help create well-paying construction jobs" in rural areas.

Harkin says the bill accomplishes two of the best economic stimulators – the creation of jobs and putting "food into the hands of those who need it most." Three Republicans voted for the bill in the Senate. No Republicans voted for it in the House. President Obama is expected to sign the nearly \$800 Billion measure Tuesday.